



Specters Of Postmodernism: Derrida, Marx, And Leftist Politics

By: **Andrew M. Koch**

Abstract

In 1994 Jacques Derrida published his long-awaited text on Marx. In the work, Derrida praises what he calls the "spirit of Marx and Marxism," identifying what he claims to be Marx's legacy of "putting back on the drawing board questions of life and spirit" (SM, 54). Derrida further identifies with what he sees as the important goal within the Marxian project, "emancipation" (SM, 75). Derrida agrees with many contemporary Marxists that the emergence of an American Empire dominated by liberalism in both the market and in politics is "threatened and threatening" at the end of the Twentieth Century (SM, 52). In order to understand the present condition, Derrida asserts that Marx is essential for the analysis of issues such as foreign debt, the plight of poor countries, protectionism, and the epidemic of overproduction (SM, 63). Yet Derrida is not a Marxist. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida again makes it clear that his project, deconstruction, has some affinities With the Marxist project, but "deconstruction is neither Marxist or Non-Marxist" (SM, 75). This declaration is nothing new, as Derrida's Marxist critics are quick to point out.

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SPECTERS OF POSTMODERNISM: DERRIDA, MARX, AND LEFTIST POLITICS

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Specters of Marx is presenting two positions simultaneously. First, Derrida praises Marx. Marx promotes the "spirit" of emancipation in a general sense, while elaborating the impediments to liberation found within capitalism's internal logic. Derrida goes to great lengths to celebrate Marx, much as one would praise the prelude of a larger enterprise. Marx is a source, a preamble, to a project that remains unfulfilled. For that reason alone, we are all in his debt.

But Derrida is also quite critical of Marx, furthering the critique of Marx begun in his earlier work. The central point of Derrida's

claim is that Marx does not have a fully articulated or consistent doctrine of materialism. Derrida suggests that Marx developed a series of metaphysical claims, ontological totalities, and epistemological paradoxes, all of which operationalize his prescriptive claims, but which erode the credibility of the materialist doctrine.

However, this work will claim that Derrida does not move very far in attempting to articulate a new "deconstructive materialism," what one could consider the logical extension of Derrida's critique. There is much that can be reconciled between Derrida and Marx, if the ideas of the Marxian prelude can be reformulated in the light of deconstruction's materialist premises. After looking at selected facets of Derrida's critique, this paper will move to the areas of agreement between the two thinkers. It will be argued that the epistemological critique presented by Derrida, and other poststructuralists, provides the basis for the reformulation of historical materialism around the liberation of the body. Such a methodology moves away from the ontological baggage in the Marxist formulation of materialism. Such a critique also moves leftist politics away from a strict application of the socialist economic prescription in favor of a pragmatic approach to economic and social policy that reflects an anarchistic ideal.

I. DERRIDA, MARX, AND THE "MISSION" OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Although Marx strove to remove spiritual or metaphysical elements from his philosophic call to arms (scientific socialism), scholars in the poststructural tradition have questioned whether or not Marx was a "true" materialist.² For Jacques Derrida (1987, 1981), the Marxist philosophy can be viewed as reaffirming a metaphysical outlook on the process of history and social change. To make the leap in establishing his political prescription (from the Derridean perspective), Marx has merely recast metaphysical theorizing into a different form.

Derrida's represents a radical break from the Enlightenment tradition in Western philosophy for several reasons. Derrida's position is one of rethinking the Western philosophic tradition, bringing to light a long-standing vacillation in Western philosophic discourse between a material hierarchy of "reality" and the challenge of achieving representation in the act of writing (Norris, *D*, 143). From this perspective, Western thinkers from Plato to Marx and beyond have ultimately conjoined material observation with

some transcendental referent (or epistemological assumption) in making truth claims.

Derrida sees the whole of Western philosophy as operating from a *logocentric* position, i.e., one that operates according to binary oppositions resolved in an act of becoming something "more true" or perfected. *Logos*, appropriately, comes from the Greek for "speech, logic, reason, [and] the Word of God" (*DS*, 4).³ Dialectics is part of the logocentric tradition from Plato, through Hegel and Marx. In this process, contradiction and tension between thesis and antithesis (negativity) is resolved in the act of becoming (Derrida, *DS*, xvii, trans. intro.). This is always a hierarchical relationship. However, Derrida's point is that the dialectical triangulation of reason in Western thought never really establishes noncontradiction. Rather, the overcoming of contradiction implies the "silencing" of supplementary meanings in language that are fundamental to the operation of what is "revealed" in philosophic discourse (*DS*, 4-6, 11).

Philosophic discourse (explicitly metaphysical or otherwise), moreover, functions in a circular and closed fashion whereby the validation of truth is derived from referencing the thought-system that generated truth propositions in the first place (*DS*, 9). In short, philosophy is justified in the process of philosophic conjecture and, therefore, any claims to knowledge put forth must ultimately develop from a speculative-metaphysical epistemological axis. The implications of Derrida's attack resonate to the very threshold of Western philosophy's legitimacy. Philosophy is just another type of writing for Derrida, therefore an arena of discourse with no more privilege to accessing and dispensing "knowledge" or "truth" than that of any other writing field (Norris, *D*, 151).

Derrida concerns himself with the displacement of meaning in the process of writing. Meaning, whether in speech or writing, is always deferred and differential, ultimately operating within an endless "signifying chain" of reference that is never completely closed (present) in the act of disseminating knowledge (*D*, 15). And without "presence" in writing, Derrida maintains that it is impossible to ever absolutely differentiate between reality and the process or act of representing reality in language (*D*, 142). (It is not to suggest, however, that poststructuralism denies "reality" outside of the text, but that the distinction between text and reality is far too compromised by our own patterns of thought to be thoroughly separated.) Writing in Western philosophy, whatever its syntactical and rational rigor, is always subject to multiple

(and unintended) interpretation in the Derridean view. The position provides space for the multiple interpretation of any text, and ultimately the "undecideability" of any text's "true" meaning.

Derrida's position has important implications for the legitimacy of any truth claims in the Marxist philosophy. From an historical perspective, Marx's assumptions about predicting the outcomes of capitalism can not be maintained through an empirical system of critique that looks inward in validating its own predictions as truthful (or scientific). The determination of historical origin in this view is but "an after-effect of meaning" (Derrida, *DS*, 21). But this criticism of the materialist view of history also cuts much deeper into the foundations of Marxism. Derrida criticizes the materialists' lack of distinction (or inability to distinguish) between "real world" empirical self-evidence and the thoughts, cognitive-interpretive processes, etc. which orders human perception of the material world (Norris, *D*, 142). This critique strikes at the underlying assumptions of Marxism, namely the divorce of empirical reason from a reliance on metaphysics in justifying its ends (mass empowerment, etc.).

Therefore, despite the claims of Marxists, Derrida argues that this formulation of materialism never gives us a "fact" or material reality that engenders the separation of dialectics from metaphysical assumption (*D*, 149). More generally, this incongruity between "materialist intention" and subsequent materialist discourse reflects an "essential complicity between empiricism and formalism" within the Hegelian tradition (Derrida, *DS*, 11). Marx has taken us on a spiritual journey, despite the claims to the contrary.

Situated within a broader dialogue about the meaning and implications of Marxism after the collapse of the Soviet system, *Specters of Marxism* considers the religious or spiritual in Marx on the level of metaphor. For example, he compares Marx's forecasting of communism's rise (the death of capitalism) to an act of exorcism. "As a coroner might do, it certifies the death but here it is in order to inflict it" (*SM*, 48). "Ending capitalism" through the act of writing is, therefore, performative, i.e., a symbolic-empirical act of ridding humanity of the spectral after-effects of capitalism, namely the alienation of labor. This is accomplished through the dissolution of the abstract money economy.

The spiritual-as-metaphoric vehicle also reflects on more concrete determinations within the Marxist doctrine. Marx, in Derrida's view sees the socio-political appreciation of money, and the gold standard, as taking on a god-like function ("a god appre-

hended by the senses") with the development of capitalism (*SM*, 48). Because Marx saw religion as *the* ideological opposition to communism, socialism, workers, etc. (*SM*, 48) it is not surprising that he also came to view the circulation and function of money/gold in the capitalist economy as a fundamental contradiction to the development of a living socialist political economy.

Derrida interrogates the deterministic tendency in Marxism to simultaneously critique capitalism and prescribe an emancipatory course of action for the poor *within a total system of being*. On this broader level of analysis, Marxism is considered to contain the same "messianic eschatology" that many world religions exhibit (*SM*, 59). In particular, it is the emancipatory aspect of Marx's writing that draws this comparison. Like the promises of Christianity (or post-Soviet neoliberalism/Hegelianism), Marxism proposes a final outcome to or end of history with the final unfolding of communism's liberating proclamation (*SM*, 66).

Much like Christianity, Marxism also posits itself as a superior and singular alternative to its opposition, i.e., one that suggests there is no other acceptable doctrine but its own. This tendency in Marxism may be due in part to Marx's philosophic relation to the Enlightenment tradition. In the essay "Faith and Knowledge" (1998), Derrida recounts the same tendency in the discourse of Kant whereby the latter philosopher's support of "moral religion" (namely Christianity) was articulated as an all-or-nothing proposition of truth. Though Marx squarely rejects Kant's ideological position on determining the moral conduct of society, Derrida notes that "it is not at all certain that the very principles of the Marxist critique do not still appeal to a heterogeneity between faith and knowledge" (*FK*, 14).

Derrida views Marx as falling within this tradition. Derrida discusses the function of messianism in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (1997). Messianism combines the singular with the general to create a universal appeal and the promise of change. However, such doctrine ultimately requires an act of faith on the part of the individual in accepting it (*DC*, 22-3). Messianisms, therefore, preconfigure historical and human experiences into a universal system of belief/faith (Derrida, *DC*, 156-9). This is a tendency in all religion, whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, and in the "philosophic messianisms" of Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger. All provoke bloodshed "in the name of the promise" (*DC*, 160-1).

II. IN PRAISE OF MARX

Despite Derrida's criticisms of Marx, much of the discussion of *Specters* engages praise for the "spirit" of Marx's intent. As Derrida puts it, his own methodological perspective, deconstruction, would be unthinkable without Marx (SM, 92). What can this mean after such criticism and efforts to disassociate himself from Marx? From Derrida's perspective Marxism contains three very important elements; material critique, the goal of human emancipation, and the elements for a critique of representation. All three of these are at the core of Marx's spirit, and all three are essential components of deconstruction.

A. Material Critique

Derrida's reading of Marx seeks to bring Marx into the fold of deconstruction. Following Maurice Blanchot, Derrida asserts that the best reading of Marx asserts its heterogeneity rather than its universalist tendencies. As Blanchot suggests, in Marx there should be no "single joining," but the production of a multitude of heterogeneous voices (SM, 29).

Heterogeneity emerges from a reading that stresses the role of critique over a socialist model of the relations of production. Heterogeneity comes from the process of questioning, of the search for the sources of oppression and dehumanization. Such an inquiry is never completed, but is to retain a place as part of an ongoing social critique. Socialism, as a prescription, is a closed answer to a question that cannot be closed. What Derrida is suggesting is that we read Marx as posing a question that is more important and more enduring than any answer. That is the spirit of Marx, open, unending critique over foundationalism.

Critique has as its objective the purging of "ghosts." According to Derrida, Marx had identified many ghosts. Money and exchange-value are treated as apparitions when juxtaposed to use-value (SM, 41, 154). The promise of emancipation through liberal politics exists as a ghost, a goal deferred, when compared to the liberal economic reality. Unemployment, disenfranchisement, foreign debt, ethnic conflicts, etc. exist as reflections of the gap between promise and reality. Marx's spirit not only confronts the means to these ends, but the deconstructive reading of Marx suggests that the ideals of human rights, democracy, suffrage, etc. should be integral to the process of critique (87).

Purging ghosts is only accomplished from a materialist perspective. This is what makes us all "heirs to Marx" (90). While critical of Marx's ontological formulations and his teleological and messianic view of history, Derrida views Marx as the starting point for his own critical examination of the social environment. Deconstruction is unthinkable without materialism, as is Michel Foucault's discussion of the genealogical method. Marx conditions us to think of people and events in their material contexts. He further asserts that human beings stop thinking of consciousness as an independent category. Consciousness is interwoven in the material existence of human beings. Consciousness is conscious existence in actual processes of material life (GI, 154).

Deconstruction is about making ghosts apparent, to make their sources "real" and material. Critique must begin with material premises. While Derrida broadens the scope of material critique beyond simply those engaged in production, this legacy of Marx is a central component in the poststructuralist approach generally.

B. Emancipation

Another significant aspect of Marx's work that Derrida celebrates in *Specters* is human emancipation. Emancipation exists as a promise or goal within the Marxian economic and social critique. It provides direction to political activity and philosophic inquiry. It is essential to the conditions of critique, as it cannot be separated from the material conditions of existence. It is the undeconstructable promise, as it is the condition for deconstruction itself (59).

In this discussion of emancipation Derrida takes what some might consider an extremely "anti-Marxist" track. In the talk of emancipating the "spirit" one might conclude that Derrida is asserting an ontological position for consciousness, opening himself to the charges Marx leveled against Feuerbach, Proudhon, and Stirner. Read metaphorically, however, the term "spirit" can be read as the condition which is made possible when the body is in a condition of self-construction.

In that sense emancipation must be considered to contain two related components, one that deals with the liberation of time, the other that deals with liberation from the conditions that deny self-construction. In what is a rather abbreviated discussion of the components of *Das Kapital*, Derrida discusses the life of a commodity, the distinction between use and exchange value, the simulated nature of money, and a few other components of Marx's

critique of capitalism. Unfortunately, Derrida does not follow through in this discussion to develop the links that Marx makes to human emancipation. The purpose of Marx's critique is to provide a conceptual mapping for the ways in which capitalism prevents human emancipation. Such an understanding is best achieved by beginning with the *Grundrisse* and working back to *Capital*.

In the *Grundrisse* Marx makes it very clear that the matter of liberation cannot be separated from the realities of "time." "It is no longer the labor time but the disposable time which is the measure of wealth." (G, 146). The productive force of the machine generates a dual outcome. It is capable of generating massive amounts of use-value, while at the same time generating a reduction in the labor time necessary for social reproduction. Money is the "ghost" that drives this process (SM, 45). "Real economy consists in the saving of working time; but this saving is identical with the development of productivity" (48).

Given this reading, Marx does have some difficulty defending his criticisms of Adam Smith (126). The emancipation of human beings from labor is connected to the general process of liberation itself. It is not just capitalism that enslaves us, but also the necessity of our material being. Marx's point is that we acknowledge this as the starting point for all our discussions of social and political life.

Acknowledging the emancipation of time expands the liberating potential presented in *Capital*. Capitalism does not allow the productive value of the machine to be manifested as liberation from labor time. Necessary labor time is reduced, but because of the internal logic of capitalism, there is continual pressure to expand the total work time expended by labor. Emancipation of the "spirit" is the ability of labor for self-construction outside of dictates of bodily necessity.

Marx goes to great lengths to aggrandize labor. He speaks of it as the place where human essence is fulfilled. "Work is required for self-realization... [w]ork is a positive creative activity" (Marx, G, 126). However, such a statement must be read as part of Marx's onto-theology. It is a transcendental assertion, an apriori claim. There is only activity. All labor time is the distraction from the process of self-creation.

This does not mean that labor time cannot be constituted in a way that is more just and more respectful to the working class. The poststructuralists are generally ambivalent to the categories of socialism and capitalism. However, analysis is distinct from pre-

scription. Derrida can accept the critique of capitalism without accepting the ontological and teleological claims necessary to operationalize Marx's prescriptions.

In the *German Ideology* Marx comes closer to the deconstructive reading than he does in the *Grundrisse*. It is here that Marx stresses the loss "of all semblance of self-activity" by labor (Marx, GI, 191). Our material bodies create the need for labor. The machine cannot liberate us from those bodies, but it has the potential to emancipate us from using our precious time in their service. The human condition is defined by the material needs of our biological existence and the tension that creates with the desire for self-directed activity. From this perspective, liberation from the material demands of the body is a necessary condition for the liberation of the spirit.

C. The Problem of Representation

Marx presents the reader with a problem. On the one hand Marx introduces elements for a radical critique of the existing conditions of knowledge, suggesting the content of consciousness is a reflection of the material conditions of social reproduction. On the other hand, for Marx to make the prescriptive claims contained in his writings he is forced to represent a view of "natural man," not as a manifestation of the past, but as a representation of a future in which the human being is unfettered by the alienating conditions of the present. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marxism has engaged such radically different forms of appropriation of the Marxian corpus.

The humanistic reading of Marx stresses the concerns for democracy and social justice, arguing that the system of capitalism not only exploits the working class economically, but denies them the freedom and justice that is found within true democratic practice. In the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," Marx speaks of democracy as a condition in which the whole is determined by the individuals that make up society (CC, 20). Democracy can account for the varied modes of being found in a society. In democracy the laws exist for man, not man for the laws (CC, 20).

True democracy can be achieved, and alienation ended, when the conditions of exploitation have given way to a new form of social organization. Such a transformation is not a result of "political will," as the utopian socialists have suggested, but emerges out of the changes occurring in the material processes of produc-

tion. Just as tribalism, empire, and feudalism have all given way under the transformation of the material implements of production, so will the capitalist system of relations. The development of heavy industrial production generates the material conditions for a transformation from capitalism to communism. Revolutionary activity is the recognition of both the methodological underpinnings of the analysis of history and the adoption of the representation of the human aspirations that Marx has outlined.

From Derrida's perspective, the legacy of Marx's spirit is found in the materialist interpretation of history and all social life. It is the position that supports Derrida's own methods of deconstruction as well as the genealogical methods of Nietzsche and Foucault. However, the messianic character of Marxist ideology cannot be separated from the representation of human essence. It is the representation of the human character, embedded within both the teleology of history and the emancipatory potential of the working class that is more problematic within the poststructuralist framework. Viewed by Derrida, these constitute metaphysical and transcendental claims, inconsistent with the material premises of Marx's analysis.

Humanity has paid dearly for the idea that we can define human essence, represented as some sort of "arch-ghost" (Derrida, *SM*, 175). Essence haunts humanity, as it has constituted the starting point for our understanding of social life since the time of Plato. Derrida says he does not "fault" Marx for this, as he is also the inheritor of this tradition (*SM*, 175).

While admitting his own deconstructive method cannot eliminate all the metaphysical trapping found within language, Derrida does assert that his method is better able to uncover the ghostly character of representation as it effects the conditions of social and political life. Like Nietzsche, Foucault, other poststructuralists, and the materialist side of Marx, Derrida historicizes the representation of the subject. Within the deconstructive reading, there can be no natural/social distinction made regarding subjectivity. This is the basis of Derrida's criticisms of Levi-Strauss,⁴ and constitutes the core of his claims against Marx. Totalizing concepts are used to create both the authority and the hierarchy of the word. The fact that the working class is able to reflect back upon itself to create a construction of the working class as "subject" does not alter the self-referencing and historically contingent nature of the process. All such constructions create a hierarchy that seeks to promote and defend a particular mode of existence. The

fact that the working class has been a class that has been exploited does not alter the metaphysical character of this formulation.

Where Marx returns to the fold of Derrida's deconstructive method is in the way in which he describes the importance of dissemination. The specter that haunts Europe is the specter of dissemination. Without the onto-theology of the subject as the foundational premises for either the liberal/capitalistic or the working class/socialist view of the subject, the struggle among these ideological poles constitutes the struggle for dissemination. Who speaks? Who gets to control the image of the subject represented in the culture?

Derrida seeks to take us beyond such poles, by denying epistemological validity to all such ghosts. Truth is plural. What survives in Marx's view of the subject is that there are multiple stories about the self. These stories are born of historical conditions, reflecting and conditioning a mode of existence. The working class has its story, its truth about the world. Such a truth validates itself through repetition, not by its connection to "being" (Derrida, *DS*).

When Marx moves from the materialist premises that inform the social construction of the subject to the assertion that one class has history's blessing, he has moved back into the fold of the Enlightenment's universalist ontology. To Derrida, such formulations are both epistemologically unsound and politically dangerous. The construction of a universal subject, with the assumptions of universal rationality, equality, and moral norms, does not solve the problem of emancipation, but circumscribes its limits. The history of the West since the Enlightenment has been a period in which barbarism has been justified in the name of universal humanity.

III. DECONSTRUCTIVE MATERIALISM

In spite of his rejection of Marx's construction of the universal subject, Derrida still supports the goal of emancipation. Where can such an agenda come from if there is no means by which to construct the "natural man?" While the answer can be found in a variety of other works by Derrida, as well as other poststructuralists, within the pages of *Specters* the key to such understanding comes from Derrida's resurrection of Max Stirner.

Why Stirner? The humanistic reading of Marx contains ontological and teleological elements that are in contradiction to the premises of poststructuralist thought. Marx outlines a means of

engaging in materialist critique, and does so for the descriptive elements of his work. But Marx does more than describe. He engages a prescriptive element that returns to the notion of "essence" in representing the natural condition of human association. Capitalism is critiqued not just because it will be superceded, but also because it is an unjust system that promotes greed and avarice.⁵ Only in true communism can our essence be returned (Marx, *EPM*, 71).

But how can a materialist speak of essence? A vindicated Stirner commands presence in Derrida's work because Stirner's materialism does not move beyond the empirical being of the body. Stirner rejects representation, what he terms the "fixed idea" (*EHO*, 63). Creating fixed concepts, asserting human essence, or claiming transcendental truth, makes us prisoners to their images. The idea makes the human being subject to itself (*EHO*, 43).

When Marx moves within the humanistic construction of essence, he has moved away from his materialist premises. He has left his historical and relativistic claims regarding social construction and asserts a representation of essence that lies outside of historical conditions. He has exempted both human beings and society from the origins of his own critique.

A. Epistemological Critique

Materialism has as its basis in an epistemological, not an ontological critique. Marx begins his analysis following this path. In both the *German Ideology* and the *Manifesto* Marx asserts that there is a relationship between the content of consciousness and the sensuous experience of life. The production of ideas is interwoven with the material activity of human beings (Marx, *GI*, 154).

Such a claim is an epistemological assertion regarding the construction of knowledge. It denies the very possibility of representing human essence that is exempt from these historical forces. In this regard, Marx is in the same camp with Stirner, Nietzsche, Derrida, and many other poststructuralists.

From this perspective the entire "text" of the human experience, the political, moral, and institutional constructions have their origins in the experiential conditions of life. But text only refers to other texts. It has no origin in being (Derrida, *WD*, 292), or in the representation of essence to which social and political life must conform. The construction of essence is always a metaphysical construction that has its origins in the experiences of social existence.

The construction of essence is an attempt to close the epistemological field, to complete a concept, in order that it can be used in social prescription. It centers meaning, denying alternative formulations. In the case of human subjectivity, once the meaning of essence is established it creates the foundational premises for application.

But if essence is a social construction, then representations of the subject can never be closed. There can be no "natural" human being. There is only the infinite play of substitutable contents (*WD*, 289).

Denying the possibility of fixed ontological constructions reduces the construction of knowledge to an anthropological exercise. Our understanding of the world is the reflection of real human activity. It has no ontological standing. Such is the position of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault in their use of the genealogical method. It is the position of Marx in the description of how the mode of production influences social and political existence. It is abandoned by Marx in his claims that communism can return human beings to their natural essence.

Materialism contains an epistemological critique. All constructions of social knowledge are interpretative. They are linked to the influences of history, technology, production, and class. This epistemological claim is not altered by the introduction of new representations of the subject.

B. Emancipation of the Body

Emancipation of the body is the outcome of the epistemological critique of representation. Fixing a stable identity to the human subject is part of the process of human objectification. Once the stability of the essence is asserted, human beings become the objects of manipulation and control. As Derrida puts it, once the world of unique individuals is objectified, the human being is turned into the material for "production units," "police computers," and "concentration camps" (*SR*, 317). The process of constructing essence denies self-construction and self-directed activity. All such constructions have a totalitarian potential, even if they pronounce themselves differently.

From this assertion comes the problem in the Marxian position. Marx repeatedly states his goal is the emancipation of all, through the emancipation of the conditions in which labor finds itself in capitalist society. Only then can human essence be returned to man (Marx, *EPM*, 84, 89). To return essence, there must

be something that is fixed and immutable. However, based on the materialist epistemological critique of representation, Marx's view of essence cannot be posited as the alternative foundational premise for social construction.

So on what logical grounds can an alternative discussion of liberation be based? To put it simply, if the image of the self is historicized, as a construction having its origins in the sensuous activity of the body, and if the products of such activity are the sources of our self-understanding, then the protection that must be afforded through "liberation" is to the sensing unit itself, the body. Emancipation cannot have as its object "identity" or even "class." Those are social and historical constructions. From a materialist perspective, it must center on the body.

The body is the nexus of the emancipatory agenda of Marx, Derrida, and Stirner. For Stirner this comes with the understanding of the uniqueness of the self. Denying the representation of the self leaves only the flesh and bone of the self. The "I" is the uniqueness of the individual that is self-constructed. As Stirner puts it, my value is that I am an "I" (Stirner, *EHO*, 366). But the "I" lies outside of the possibility of representation. It is unique to the self. Emancipation must lead to the body's freedom, as the vehicle for the construction of one's own unique self.

For Derrida, the uniqueness of the self is manifested in the idea of difference. However, difference has two meanings for Derrida. Difference is connected to the process of identity construction. Derrida asserts that identity describes not just assigned characteristics but also includes those elements that the object is not (*P*, 26). But, difference is also an outcome. It constitutes an ethical commitment having its origins in the inability to assign stable and fixed identities.⁶ The result of this process is plurality. Difference is a recognition of uniqueness.

Emancipation of the body stems from the inability to provide epistemological closure. There can be no universal experience that can direct the processes of others. Denial of the unique character of each body's interaction with the environment constitutes a loss of freedom as self construction. As Michel Foucault puts it, we must recognize each life as a work of art in progress (*GE*, 236).

Derrida proposes that social life incorporate radical heterogeneity. True liberation is from those forces that enslave the body. The idea of emancipation does not justify any bondage (Derrida, *SM*, 90). This means that real freedom must consist of liberating all human beings from those conditions which dictate to the body,

that establish the conditions which inhibit the free exercise of self construction. This is why Derrida says to keep faith with the spirit of Marx we must engage in radical critique (*SM*, 88). We must also never forget that Marx was interested in activity, not just talk (*SM*, 89).

C. Emancipation and Capitalism

A deconstructive reading of Marx rejects the onto-theology necessary for the prescription of communism. Such a reading eliminates the primacy and ahistorical nature of working class consciousness. Such a reading also rejects the notion that history "ends" with the coming of a communist society. However, such a reading saves the critique of capitalism, as it places the critique within the broader framework of emancipating the body.

Interpreted this way, several elements of the Marxian critique require a reelaboration. Marx makes it clear that production is linked to the maintenance of the body. In the *German Ideology*, and elsewhere, Marx indicates that people will not be liberated until there are enough material necessities to satisfy human needs (Marx, *GI*, 169). Emancipation is tied to the satisfaction of the material needs of the body. As Marx states earlier in the *German Ideology*, the first premise of history is that we be able to live (*GI*, 156). The body's needs must be satisfied prior to any discussion of emancipation.

Is it possible to achieve complete emancipation when human beings must serve the material needs of the body? Simply stated, it is not. Regardless of the arrangement within the "relations of production," absolute emancipation cannot be achieved as long as human beings have bodies that require material provisions in order to survive. As Marx himself admits, real liberation is liberation from the dictates of material necessity. Such liberation cannot be achieved in its absolute form.

For this reason, Marx concludes in the *Grundrisse* that time is the measure that should be incorporated into our social understanding of production. Real savings is manifested in the saving of labor time, just as real emancipation is the emancipation of human labor from the service of material necessity. "It is no longer the labor time but the disposable time which is the measure of wealth.... The development of heavy industry means... the appropriation of the labor time of others ceases to constitute or create wealth." (Marx, *G*, 146). Marx's point here is that capitalism's logic and structure serve to prevent the real reduction of labor time, denying to the workers the benefits of increasing produc-

tivity brought about by the introduction of the machine. By denying the benefits of increasing productivity to those in the production process, capitalism is unable to secure itself as a set of relations that serves human emancipation.

This is the case because within the logic of capitalism, the very existence of the private entrepreneur is predicated on the maximization of surplus work time, while reducing the amount of necessary work time through the use of machines. The maximization of productivity in capitalism also means the payment of minimal wages due to the commodification of labor, and the determination of the wage structure based on supply and demand. Competition among the bourgeoisie, and the increasing use of mechanized production, work to impoverish the workforce through creating downward pressure on wages and demands for labor time. Such claims regarding the functioning of capitalism are impossible to deny.

The problem in Marx emerges when he leaves this descriptive analysis in favor of a prescriptive assertion. Marx engages a series of onto-ethical claims in order to assert both the need and the right of the working class to overthrow these conditions. Marx asserts that none should live off the labor of others, that there is no distinction between work of head and hand, that wage labor is exploitation, that all labor is social labor, etc.... All of these, and others, constitute the foundation of Marx's ethical attack on capitalism. Again, Marx uses terms like avarice and greed to describe the foundations of capitalism (Marx, *EPM*, 71). "[In capitalism] [e]very product is a bait with which to seduce away the other's very being" (*EPM*, 94).

Marx concludes that all should share in production and consumption in relatively equal amounts. Again to simplify: there is an amount of necessary labor that needs to be done, and if we all share in it equally, regardless of what role we play, our commitment of equal time generates for us an entitlement to an equal share of social product. Beyond what is necessary to produce for our material existence, free time is to be returned to all in an equal manner. Communism, therefore, is not an end in itself (*EPM*, 93). It is a mean to the liberation of humanity from a condition of exploitation.

While these may be laudable goals, they must be treated as derivatives of ethical and ontological commitments that are distinct from Marx's claims regarding the logic of capitalism. Therefore, while Marx begins to lay the foundation for an ongoing critique

of metaphysics, he abandons his materialism in order to represent an ontological essence that is denied within capitalism. Therefore, his prescriptive elements are purely modernist in their origins.

This is such a powerful image that even Derrida abandons his normal ambivalence toward what are seemingly "Enlightenment" commitments. In *Specters* Derrida speaks of the new international order embracing human rights and democracy on a global scale (*SM*, 84). Such a commitment on Derrida's part requires embracing the universality of both reason and equality, something that may shake the Nietzschean roots of Derrida's position.

Still, if one looks upon the emancipation of the body as a result of an epistemological critique of representation in general, then Derrida may be on safer ground. Capitalism must be forced by political means to address its logical tendencies. It must confront the matter of time, as it was forced to confront the tendency to produce monopolies and its tendency to impoverish workers. It must be forced to emancipate human laborers from the activity of labor.

Derrida states that he is neither Marxist nor non-Marxist (75). We have moved beyond such categories. The objective of emancipating labor is not the sole possession of Marxism. It may not require a communist society. It may not even require a revolution. However, it would require more diverse voices, better avenues of information and organization. Derrida is optimistic, suggesting the transition is already under way (103).

IV. REPLACING SOCIALISM WITH ANARCHISM IN THE POLITICS OF THE LEFT

The deconstructive critique of Marx requires a rethinking of the connection between Marx's objectives and his methods. Even to Marx socialism was considered a means and not an end (Marx, *EPM*, 93). Socialism was treated as a form of social construction that would liberate the time of the labor force and return it to them as disposable time. Within this framework emancipation of labor time was the goal, socialist economics only the means.

However, within Marx the emancipation of labor time came at the cost of political emancipation. The withering away of the state apparatus was maintained as a distant objective while the present promised only the dictatorship of a single representation of subjectivity. The "end" toward which both history and essence was traveling justified the messianic pursuit of a singularity in the

present. The emancipatory potential was lost to a reimposed singularity that was, itself, another historically constructed, yet universalized, image. As a result, emancipation was deferred to the future.

Liberating the body does not present the same problem as liberating the subject. The constructed subject has its origins in the interests, contexts, and conditions in which bodies find themselves. Subjectivity is always an ideological construction. The body, stripped of its historical subjectivity, is mere physical presence. Therefore, all liberation begins with the liberation of the body. For this reason, the body is the starting point for Stirner, Foucault, and Derrida. It must also be the starting point for a rematerialized Marx. If Marx is correct, that consciousness is a phantom, then the liberation of consciousness without liberation of the body is phantom liberation.

Liberating the body must take into account two related elements. Emancipation must have a political component, in which the body is liberated in its movements and its actions. Political liberation means the expression and activity of difference. Here the postmoderns have much to offer a reconfigured view of the left. The second element of liberation concerns economics. Marx is correct, emancipation without the emancipation of time is hollow. The liberation of time is, at the same time, the liberation of human beings from material want and material necessity. This issue Marx understood very well.

A. Political Liberation and the Emancipation of the Individual

One of the great deficiencies of Marxist doctrine is the failure to resolve the tension between political and economic emancipation. This is the case because Marx did not realize that any reconstitution of the essential subject contains a totalitarian potential. There can be no consciousness that has priority, no group or individual that manifests the essence of humanity itself. There is only the play of difference, an array of human "works in progress."

The political tension emerges from the reliance on group concepts such as a class. Group concepts have two characteristics. First, they construct an "essence" or identity that designates the group's members. Secondly, they exclude, or diminish the non-members. In the first case, group concepts commit the epistemologically suspect act of representing, and in the second they operationalize themselves politically by exclusion. This process is the same re-

gardless of whether one speaks of nations, ethnic groups, or social classes.

In Marx's own time, this issue animated the tension between Marx and Bakunin. Bakunin understood the totalitarian potential contained in any prioritization of class. Bakunin is sympathetic to the goal of liberation, but denies Marx's formula will take us there. A proletarian dictatorship is still a dictatorship (Bakunin, *SA*, 181).

This is why Stirner occupies such a strategic place in Derrida's discussion. In Stirner, freedom is associated with the uniqueness of the individual self and the ability to self-construct human identity. The "I" cannot be generalized. Liberation must be of the individual. It cannot take the form of emancipating a group, or universalized class of subjects. All that has given way under the epistemological critique of poststructuralism. Groups and classes are exclusionary by definition. They cannot be the vehicles to emancipation. Stirner and Derrida take us back to the body as the reference point for liberation.

This is precisely the point manifested in the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault also focuses on the body as the starting point for his study of oppression and the critique of power. In *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault locates oppression in the control of bodies. Power is used to gain access to bodies.⁷ Society takes on the character of a large disciplinary enterprise, in the schools, churches, medical community, etc. as well as in the state. Once the construction of the self has been carried out by the institutions of power, the institutionalized body is what comes under cultural protection (Derrida, *SM*, 126).

The alternative proposed by the poststructuralists is the politics of difference. Difference means the expression of alternatives. It does not mean, as the critics of postmodernism often say, that "anything goes." It does mean that anything is open for discussion. In the absence of any fixed truth, we must discuss how we choose to live. It is our choice, but it can only be our choice if we can engage in the discussion of real alternatives to the present condition.

Difference is at the core of Derrida's own political preferences. Derrida's reading of Marx is one that stresses the openness of Marx's spirit, emphasizing difference and plurality (29). But here Stirner is also illustrative. Difference is not the manifestation of group difference or the foundation of identity politics. It is only the "I" which can be liberated because only the "I" has empirical

status. Only the "I" thinks, feels, and acts in the world. All else is the realm of ghosts.

Here, in a practical sense, the poststructuralist critique comes close to individualistic side of liberalism. The "I" is free for self-construction to the point at which it interferes with the self-construction of other. However, this formulation should not be confused with the liberal ontology. The body has status not because of an essentialist claim about the self, but resulting from the impossibility of any such claim. All that remains when the ghosts have disappeared is the individual body. As Derrida describes it, this form of emancipation must be without citizenship or class (85).

Political liberation means the emancipation from structures that serve fixed identities. Structures impose a mode of behavior consistent with their own self-maintenance. Identities establish fixed boundaries of exclusion. Therefore, the liberation of the "I" means a confrontation with the structures that seeks to promote and impose an "I" from without. The "I" must confront the state and its bureaucratic apparatus in the present in order to liberate the self.

The enduring power of Marx's ideas comes from his recognition that the emancipation of the body must take into account the condition of the body in relation to material necessity. Human beings have material needs. In the strictest sense of the term, human beings will never be fully liberated because some activity directed toward material maintenance will always be necessary. Political liberty comes from the ability to discuss and establish alternative arrangements to meet those material needs. Therefore, the emancipation of the self must have an economic as well as a political component.

B. Economic Liberation

As Derrida puts it, we are neither Marxist nor non-Marxists. One could add, we are neither communists nor capitalists. We have left those categories to the Twentieth Century. In light of the poststructuralist critique of representation and the emergence of the politics of difference, both stances have had to retreat owing to their singular construction of the self. What remains is the emancipation of the body. This is a goal, in its connection to labor, for which Marx is a beginning and not the final word.

The importance of Marx, in relation to the worker, centers on who controls labor time. Capitalism is a system of laws that protect the owners of the means of production and establishes their

rights, in written law, to control the labor time of the work force. This condition has produced a problem for the emancipation of the body. When considered in the aggregate, workers have not seen an increase in free time that is commensurate with the increases in productivity. The liberating potential of heavy industry and, today, high technology, computerization, and other techniques of the electronic age, have not been brought to bear in a way that enhances the liberation of the individual's labor time. Capitalism has been as resourceful at providing new "needs" as it has been successful at satisfying old ones.⁸

However, emancipation does not come with the realization of class consciousness. While the left must focus on the goal of liberating human beings from a process that does not allow labor, in the aggregate, to enjoy the benefits of increasing productivity, the goal of a singular class consciousness cannot be its objective. Difference, as an ethical stance, cannot accommodate, epistemologically speaking, a reconstituted metanarrative on the subject. However, returning free time to individuals can be accommodated within the ethics of difference.

Marx correctly points out that the logic of capitalism, in its purest form, simply cannot accommodate the objective of returning surplus labor time to the workers. Capitalism thrives through the process of extracting surplus labor time from the workers. Private enterprise is successful to the degree it can maximize both the productivity of labor and the amount of time to which it can put the laborer to the wheel.

One is drawn to two conclusions regarding Marx's analysis. Marx is correct in saying that emancipation cannot be achieved within the pure form of capitalism. However, Marx's critics are correct in asserting that his prescription will lead to enhanced powers for the state apparatus.⁹ Given these limitations, what is to be done?

In order to speak of emancipation, it must include the liberation from material necessity. To that end, it is necessary to redirect the resources of production away from the production of commodities not necessary to material existence. Such fetishized and symbolic production not only wastes human labor power, but is also a significant factor accelerating the destruction of the earth's ecology. It must also be possible to direct the savings in labor time to labor, in the aggregate, in order to avoid the prospects of mass unemployment and economic collapse. Is it possible to do this without a "dictatorship of the proletariat?"

The insight of Marx's genius was to recognize that the political and economic objectives could only be realized with the democratization of the production process. This means that a system must be created in which the laboring class has more control over the time that it commits to production. This will require some organized mechanism in which the production of superfluous goods is minimized in favor of the production of material necessities. It must be possible to ask the question, "do we want more salad shooters, chia pets, and pizza warming trays, or would we prefer more time with our families, more time for the process of self creation?" Marx makes it clear that the shortening of the work day is a necessity for the realization of freedom (C, 441).

However, today, there is very limited political space to ask such a hard economic question. Marx was correct in saying that the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of the ruling class. The media have had the role of disseminating the message of liberal capitalism. Politicians, the media, and academics all cooperate to promote the hegemony of liberal economics (Derrida, SM, 53). The power of difference has yet to make itself fully felt as a presence within the capitalist order.

Difference requires a movement in the commitment of time, away from the production of surplus value, toward the production of emancipated time. Liberation requires liberation from labor time. This means allowing the labor force to reap the benefits of increases in productivity. Does this require the end to capitalism? Perhaps in the end, but it need not be an immediate agenda item. There are a variety of alternative that could enhance the availability of free time. The work week could be reduced legislatively, with overtime compensation raised to three or four times normal pay. The minimum wage could be raised dramatically, such that waged employment would provide entry into the middle class. On the macro level, caps on income and wealth could be instituted as a disincentive to production, and heavy taxes could be used as a redistributive strategy for the production of superfluous goods.

Such ideas are only an opening, to stimulate the discussion about the goals of life and work. It is this "spirit" that Derrida recognizes in Marx's writings. In order to emancipate human beings it is necessary to reverse the direction in labor time, reverse the tendencies of longer hours in the production of superfluous commodities.

Any such adjustments to the capitalist order will require political action. In the *Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau makes the claim that legislation should be used to overcome the natural tendencies of capitalist economics. Institutions should be modified by legislation to enhance the well being of the citizens, in order that they lead better and happier lives.¹⁰ One need not end private ownership to achieve that objective. However, one must have the political space in order to explore alternatives.

Such political space and political will are presently lacking in the United States. The dissemination of the rational economic actor model of human nature has left the halls of the business schools and entered the domain of the social science disciplines as an ontological commitment. Such a pantheistic god is hard to resist.

However, Derrida is optimistic. He believes a transformative process is already under way. In the absence of any metanarrative on subjectivity, there is only the play of difference. In the world of multiple truths, the ability to disseminate alternatives to the ruling ideas will be the beginning of this process.

This struggle will be for the hearts and mind of the population. It will not be played out on the factory floors or in the streets. It will be a battle for the instruments of dissemination. The rudimentary structures of democratic politics are in place within the industrial states. However, the means of dissemination reflect plutocratic interests reinforced by social darwinistic ideology. This connection is enhanced by the ownership structure of corporate entities, where there is either common ownership or common interests shared across the instruments of production and the instruments of dissemination. But, today there are more instruments of dissemination than ever before, both electronic and print. The avenues for difference are under construction.

CONCLUSION

Today leftist politics must have an anarchistic component. Difference demands the open exploration of alternatives, not the rigid adherence to one particular form of identity. Only by adopting the agenda of liberating individual bodies does it move beyond the parochialism of class and identity politics. It is the anarchistic defense of the body that refuses to leave emancipation as the deferred objective.

Anarchism is not a condition but a direction. In the social realm, the goal must be to reduce the intrusive arm of govern-

ment to a minimum in the affairs of individual human beings. In the economic realm, it must engage a discourse that includes the emancipation of the body from labor, to the extent possible given the material needs of the body and circumscribed by the democratic processes that direct the commitments of labor time. This is the part of Marx that gets lost in the discussion of the working class and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the part of Marx that must be revived and carried forward.

The left is in danger of squandering this moment in history, as it splinters and fragments into an array of movements under the banner of "identity politics." Poststructuralism has, in part, provided the epistemological foundation for this to occur by deconstructing the dominant metanarratives in the Western tradition. However, when all the ghosts of the past are gone, the individual material body still remains. Emancipating that body can still be the objective of a reconstituted left.

What the poststructuralists also bring to our political understanding of a post-metanarrative world is the importance of being able to disseminate a message. In the absence of fixed universals, all is possible. But possibilities require open space for their transmission. The left must use every means to disseminate its message to a public that is awash in the absurd rhetoric of "patriotic consumption."

NOTES

1 See as examples Aijaz Ahmad, 1994, "Reconciling Derrida: 'Specters of Marx' and Deconstructive Politics," *New Left Review*, 208: 88-106; Alex Callinicos, 1996, "Messianic Ruminations," *Radical Philosophy*, 75: 37-58; Kate Soper, 1996, "The Limits of Hauntology," *Radical Philosophy*, 75: 26-36; Gayatri Spivak, 1995, "Ghostwriting," *Diacritics* 25 (2): 65-84.

2 See Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 142-143. Henceforth, *D*.

3 Translator's notes.

4 Jacques Derrida, "Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse on the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

5 See Marx, *EPM*, 71.

*6 See Todd May, *The Moral Theory of Poststructuralism* (University Park, Penn State University Press, 1995).

7 See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980), 125.

8 Here, Jean Baudrillard's notion of "symbolic value" is useful in augmenting Marx, assisting in the explanation of the dynamic of capitalist production in the face of material abundance.

9 See Bakunin, and Max Weber, both of whom suggest a similar outcome.

10 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, (London: Dent Publishing, 1986).

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